



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Grand Canyon National Park

PO Box 129
Grand Canyon, AZ 86023

928 638-7779 phone
928 638-7609 fax
www.nps.gov/grca

Grand Canyon News Release

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Contact(s): Maureen Oltrogge

Phone number: 928-638-7779

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Finding of No Significant Impact Signed for Bright Angel Creek Trout Reduction Project in Grand Canyon National Park

Grand Canyon, Ariz. – A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was signed last week for Michael Snyder, Intermountain Regional Director, for the Bright Angel Creek Trout Reduction Project in Grand Canyon National Park.

In August 2006 the National Park Service (NPS) prepared an *Environmental Assessment/Assessment of Effect for the Bright Angel Creek Trout Reduction Project* (EA/AEF). The EA/AEF analyzed the impacts that would likely result from implementation of the project. The environmental assessment evaluated two alternatives in detail, Alternative A, the No Action Alternative, and Alternative B, the agency's preferred alternative.

The proposal (preferred alternative) was to remove non-native fish, primarily trout, from the creek during their spawning season (approximately October-January) each year for five years. In addition, the effectiveness of the program would be assessed by monitoring population changes in the Bright Angel Creek fish community in early spring/summer each year; all non-native fish captured as part of this monitoring effort would be removed from the creek. The dual purposes of the proposed action are to benefit endangered humpback chub (*Gila cypha*) and other native fish species in the mainstem Colorado River, and to restore and enhance, to the extent possible, the native fish community that once flourished in Bright Angel Creek. The project is needed because non-native species, primarily trout, have become dominant in Bright Angel Creek, and trout are known to prey on or out compete native fish including the endangered humpback chub in the mainstem Colorado River and side streams.

After consideration of public and agency comments on the EA/AEF, Alternative B, as modified in response to comments received, was selected as the preferred alternative and proposed undertaking. Under Alternative B, all non-native fish, primarily brown trout and rainbow trout, will be mechanically removed from Bright Angel Creek using 1) a weir to capture the fish as they move upstream into the creek to spawn, and 2) electrofishing and dip netting (depletion sampling) in conjunction with weir use as part of fish community response monitoring to

determine the effects of the project on the fish community in the creek. Initial depletion efforts will focus on removal of brown trout. Rainbow trout will not be removed until consultation with the state has occurred and required state permits have been obtained as required by Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations §24.4.

Beginning Tuesday, November 14, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service biologists will install and operate a weir throughout the trout spawning season for approximately 70-86 consecutive days. At the end of this period, the weir will be removed. The weir will be placed in the creek downstream of Phantom Ranch near the footbridge by the NPS river ranger station.

Fish that are captured during this project will be removed, identified, measured, inspected for reproductive condition, and scanned for the presence of PIT (Passive Integrated Transponder) tags. Native fish not previously tagged will be injected with PIT tags. Native species will be released above the weir. Non-native fish (e.g., brown trout) will be euthanized and the remains made available for beneficial uses such as garden composting by Native American tribes.

Total eradication of non-native trout from Bright Angel Creek will not be accomplished as a result of this project; however, populations of trout and other non-native fish will be substantially reduced and maintained at lower levels, thus decreasing overall competition with, and predation potential on, native fish.

To determine the effects of trout reduction on the fish community in Bright Angel Creek, population changes in that community will be monitored annually. Monitoring efforts are outlined in the EA/AEF and FONSI. Copies of both documents can be found online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grca>.

For additional information on this project, please contact Rick Ernenwein, Project Planning Leader, at (928) 779-6279.

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